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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 001618

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARPI; NEA/ELA

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SUBJECT: DEPUTY PM SHAIKH MOHAMMAD ON FTA, IRAN AND SYRIA

REF: A. MANAMA 1594

1B. STATE 199863

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

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SUMMARY

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11. (C) Ambassador called on Deputy Prime Minister and former Foreign Minister Shaikh Mohammad bin Mubarak Al Khalifa October 31 at the newly refurbished Gudaibiya Palace in Manama. During the meeting they discussed transfer of Guantanamo detainees (reftel A), progress on the FTA, recent belligerent statements by Iranian President Ahmadi-Nejad, Syrian participation at the Forum for the Future, and the King's upcoming visit to Saudi Arabia.

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FTA

12. (C) Ambassador updated Shaikh Mohammad on the FTA noting that the mark-up of the legislation would take place this week. He stated that some Democrats had voiced concerns about labor issues, and that Minister of Finance Shaikh Ahmad had responded through private letters what steps the GOB has and plans to take to allay their concerns. The Ambassador clarified that these concerns go beyond simply the trade deal with Bahrain, and have broader foreign trade policy ramifications. Shaikh Mohammad asked to know what are the next steps and what was required from Bahrain. Ambassador pointed to two immediate issues of concern. First, we are making a push for ratification by the Congress. We may ask the Crown Prince to make a call, but it will have to be at the right time. The second concern is the need for the GOB to revise implementing legislation for Intellectual Property Rights requirements including for copyrights, patents, trademarks, and data processing, among others. Ambassador indicated that lack of revised implementing legislation has to date delayed Morocco's FTA implementation.

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Iran

13. (C) Ambassador raised USG deep concern over Iranian President Ahmadi-Nejad's recent extremist remarks (reftel B). Shaikh Mohammad stated he shared our concern, noting that such political language was at least twenty years old. He wondered, given all the problems Iran has, why they would increase their problems with such statements at this time. Ambassador stated such outrageous statements need to be condemned, adding that surely the GOB shares our view. Shaikh Mohammad indicated the Bahraini government could consider issuing a statement, concluding "we're all working for peace,"

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Syrian participation at the Forum

14. (C) Shaikh Mohammad indicated he was aware that some parties in the G-8 were hesitant to have Syrian participation at the Forum for the Future. He wondered why, seeing as they attended the previous Forum. He noted that an invitation to the Syrian government had already gone out and cautioned that if rescinded, possibly other Arab invitees could withdraw as a result. He believed the Syrian representation would be at a low level. Ambassador said that Syria continues to be isolated, and is not even active on democracy and reform issues. Shaikh Mohammad indicated he would be discussing this issue with his British co-hosts because, to his mind, a successful Forum should be inclusive of all countries, not leaving some out while others remain in.

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Visit to Saudi Arabia

15. (C) Shaikh Mohammad stated that he would travel with

King Hamad and Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid that day to Saudi Arabia for a Ramadan visit with the Saudi leadership. Things are much better with the Saudis after last year's difficulties over the FTA, and in fact, the Bahraini FTA has pushed the Saudis to work seriously towards WTO accession. Discussions with King Abdullah, Crown Prince Sultan and Prince Bandar (secretary-general of the National Security Council) would focus on their vision towards the future. Shaikh Mohammad noted King Abdullah's initiative to bring together scholars and intellectuals for the upcoming OIC conference December 6-8 for an in-depth introspective as an Islamic body.

MONROE